

Abstract of Necropolis theory on Indus Valley civilization

The name Mohenjo Daro itself means, “It was the mound of the dead,” and the name itself is self-explanatory. The view that nearly 50,000 people were living at the time of its demise in Mohenjo Daro is not acceptable theory, because such crowded condition would have resulted in outbreak of diseases. It is likely that Indus people built mortuary houses in these sites and these clustered mortuary houses give the impression of a city. The structure identified as granary is doubtful; the photographs available at the web site (Harappa.com) shows that it looks more like a brick kiln rather than a granary. Storing grains in such large scale is a difficult job, grains will rot, and there will be insect and rat attack; considering all these factors it can be concluded that the structure was not a granary but could be a brick kiln. The photo of blocked drain presented in the same web site shows that it could be simply an entrance to a tomb. Photograph of the well shows that it could be a tunnel (Shaft Grave) to inner burial chamber at a lower level, but it looks like a well. The potteries also look like that as if they have been tailor made to needs of funeral practices. Some of them show a protruding tube, meant for funnelling the sacrificial blood into ground. The “toilets” described by archaeologists seem to be “ordinary holes” meant for pouring blood or sacrificial goods into underground burial chambers.

Key words: Blocked drain, Blood sacrifice, Brick kiln, Burial chambers, Funeral practices, Granary, Harappa, Indus Valley Civilization, Mohenjo Daro, Necropolis, Tomb, and Toilets

Necropolis theory on Indus civilization

The standard view about Mohenjo-daro is that, in ancient times it was most likely one of the administrative centres of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. It was the most developed and advanced city in South Asia, and perhaps in the world, during its peak period of existence. The planning and engineering showed the importance of the city to the people of the Indus valley. Now the time has come that this view had to be properly reconsidered.

No such big cities existed at that period in any part of the world. Large number of people living in big congested cities would have resulted in outbreak of diseases and death in large numbers. In ancient times because of the said reason, many of the villages did not grow beyond the population of few thousands. At the maximum, a town could have with stood a population of 10,000 not more than that. However, the archaeologists estimate that nearly 50,000 to 1, 00,000 people would have lived in the city of Mohenjo daro and Harappa would have sustained equal number people. Such high density of population was not possible at that time; hence, a proper explanation is needed for the dense construction of houses in these sites. It is likely that only dead bodies were kept in those houses and people were not living in those sites. This new hypothesis explains the

high density of houses found in these sites. The new theory being put forward is that these sites were necropolises not metropolises as popularly imagined so far.

Drainage system

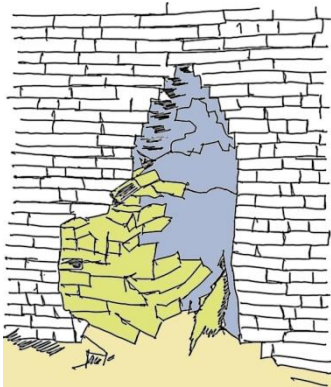


Figure 1 : Entrance of a Tomb

Much is being said about the drainage system of the two cities. No doubt, that experts dealing with these sites, believed that sustaining such huge population could have been possible because it had such a good drainage system. A closer look at the photographs presented in website Harappa.com shows that the drainage is 6 feet high and it is elevated and broad enough to allow a person to walk through the passage way. Indian cities do not have a drainage pipe more than four feet even today at modern times. What was the necessity to build such a passageway? No doubt, they were passageways, but not for cleaning the blocked drains but they were passageways to enter the tombs and the inner burial chambers or the burial rooms. The passageways would have been closed after the placing mummified bodies. The closed passageways are clearly visible in the photos presented in Harappa.com. These closed passage ways gives

the false impression that later day occupants have blocked the drainage and built new houses.

We are not able to correlate this passageway to the entry passage of a tomb because the roof of the burial chamber has fallen down. The burial chambers could have been constructed in nominal way (dummy constructions) like a room. Most probably, the roofs would not have been made of quality construction material like that off a regular living house; naturally, those roofs have not survived the time. Understandably, the roofs have fallen down. Passageways have withstood the onslaught of time but burial rooms have not survived. In this scenario, we are not able to visualize that it could have been a tomb. Two important evidences of these excavation sites are burial chambers and passageways, but these two facts have not been linked together. Interpreting only the passageways has resulted in wrong conclusions.

The plat forms of dyer's work shop

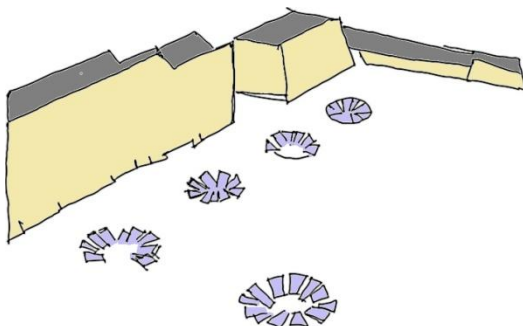


Figure 2 : Dyer's Plat forms

This enclosed hall shown in the illustration has been named as Dyer's workshop. From the depiction, we can assume that huge pots would have been kept in those circular platforms, which created a depression in the middle. It is clear that some kind utensils with round bottoms were kept in those platforms. Generally, flat bottom metal vessels called "vats" are used for such dyeing purposes. Earthen pots with narrow mouth will not fit into the role of dyeing vats. Earthen pots cannot withstand the rigor of dyeing activity. In addition to that dyeing of clothes would have required, heating system for warming up dyeing solution for proper adhesion to clothes, but no such heating facility is seen. If the purpose of these platforms are considered in light of the new theory, then the utility of above said platforms will perfectly fall into place. It is likely that these platforms could have been used for keeping "pithoi"¹ (Funeral pots with dead body inside),

Platforms for grinding mills

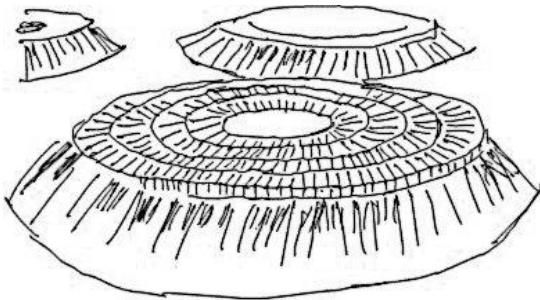


Figure 3: Grinding Mill Plat form

¹ **Pithos (plural-pithoi)**

a very large earthenware jar having a wide mouth, used by the ancient Greeks for storing liquids, as wine, or for holding food, as grain, or for the burial of the dead.

There are five to six round platforms clustered together in a narrow space near the so-called granary. At present, these platforms are being described as platforms for grinding grains. The usage for the platform is still not clear. If the above said view that the rooms were actually burial chambers, then the use of platform will also fall into place. It looks like that those platforms were built to keep the funeral pithoi over them; such a huge pot containing mummified body would have required a stable platform. The picture of platform in the Harappa.com web site shows that three or four such platforms were placed side by side in a single room. If so many platforms were used for grinding grains, then Mohenjo Daro should have been an industrial centre consisting of many grain-milling factories beating all other civilizations of that time. The new interpretation on the platforms is that these platforms were used for keeping funeral pithoi not for grinding mills.

Criticism of old theories

The name Mohenjo Daro itself means, "It was the mound of the dead," and the name itself is self-explanatory. Even in Medieval times, it is likely that these sites could have been used as burial places; existence of Islamic tomb at Harappa and Buddhist stupa at Mohenjo Daro further substantiates this proposition. Nevertheless, archaeologists are going to various lengths to prove otherwise. This place was a necropolis not a metropolis as imagined by various archaeologists. For example, the standard view is that nearly 50,000 people were living in Mohenjo daro at the prime of

its existence. This is not an acceptable proposition, because 50,000 dead bodies could have been kept in such a congested condition, but not 50,000 living people. Such a large number of people living in an insanitary condition would have resulted in outbreak of epidemics and massive number of deaths.

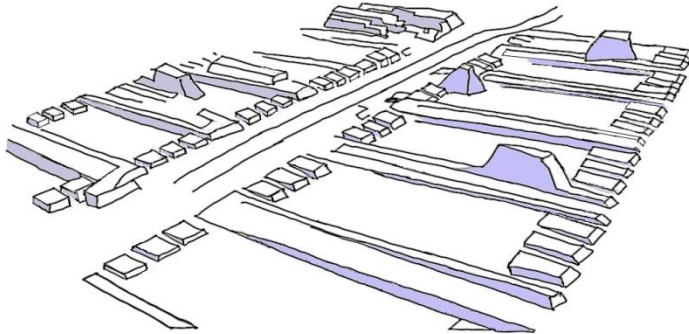


Figure 4: Granary or Brick Kiln?

The structure identified as granary is doubtful as per American history professor Kenoyer; he suggests that it could be simply a big hall. Scrutiny of the photographs available at the web site Harappa.com (Harappa.com) shows that it looks more like a brick kiln rather than a big hall. Other possibility is that it could have been the kiln used for firing the massive number of funeral potteries used in those sites. Note that the bricks extracted from these two places were used as ballast for the considerable length of the railway line during British period. Note that large numbers of bricks were used in construction of these burial tombs. For such a large-scale consumption of bricks, bricks should have been manufactured on industrial scale.

Mohenjo Daro and Harappa were important places of those times, and it is likely that mortuary business was carried out in industrial scale in these places at ancient

times. The industry, which survived at these sites, was funeral industry and business was mummification. Further, Kenoyer says that some ventilation pipe like structure exists which lead to the conclusion that it was a granary. The ventilation arrangement is an essential module in a brick kiln for proper burning of bricks. The granary depiction in various simulated models gives a feeling that it was a brick kiln rather than a granary.

Storing grains in such large scale is a difficult job, the grains should be properly dried, or it will rot within days of storage. Large scale insect attack will also occur in granaries and control of rats will be next to impossible task in such large-scale storage of grains. Considering all these factors it can be safely concluded that the structure was definitely not a granary. In addition to that, there is another valid question, “Whether Indus people had any such huge surplus production of grains to store in such big granaries?” It is unlikely that Indus people would have had enormous surplus production to store in such granaries.

This new theory of “necropolises” may give raise to a doubt that there is no evidence for dead bodies being kept in tholoi. Even though burial in urns was a standard practice in ancient times, that practice has disappeared long time back. There is no evidence of preserved bodies at Indus sites because such preserved bodies would have crumbled on exposure to light, and the grave robbers had played a significant role in robbing these mortuary temples. George Wunderlich (Wunderlich) gives a detailed account on this issue, why no such mummies have been found in the palace structure at Crete. Arthur Evans had also wrongly concluded the Minoan funeral parlour as a

“palace” because of the same reason that no mummies were found at the time of excavations. In this regard, the explanations given by George Wunderlich are informative, enlightening and are applicable to the situation in Indus sites also.

The photo of blocked drain presented by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer in the web site (Harappa.com) shows that it is simply an entrance to the tomb. It is highly impossible that such huge drains of man’s height would have been built during those times. Even as on today, Indian metros are having only two to four feet diameter drainage pipes, in such a situation building six feet high drainage channels are absolutely ill-logical and without any requirement for such a facility. Most probably, Harappans would have used open toilets, as is practice in rural India even today, not sophisticated toilets as imagined by some archaeologists. Even if some toilet like structure had been found, most likely that such facilities would have been used for cleaning dead bodies and flushing out internal remains during mummification process. This is the explanation given by George Wunderlich for “Cretan Palace toilets” and the same is applicable here in Indus sites.

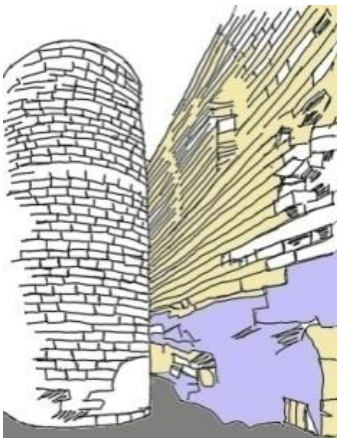


Figure 5: Well or Shaft of a grave?

Photograph of the well shows that the parapet wall is starting from ground level and goes up to two-storey level of the nearby building. See the figure-5 and compare the level of well and nearby wall (Kenoyer J. M., Harappa.com). The well is not going down into earth, instead of that it is growing up towards sky. Most probably it is a shaft (passage way) to inner burial chamber at a lower level, but it looks like a well.

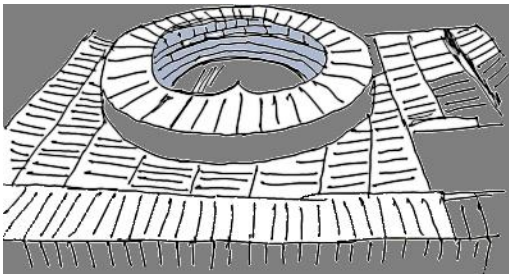


Figure 6: Heart Shaped grave.

Some wells are oval shaped some are heart shaped (Photos of Kenoyer in Harappa.com). I am yet to see an oval shaped parapet wall of a well construction in any of existing wells in India. See the heart shaped parapet wall has been built over a brick platform. The wall is hardly two feet in height and there is no well below. Then, what is the purpose of this construction? It is simply a grave. Most probably, a man would have built this grave for his dead young wife showing his love and affection by the heart shape.

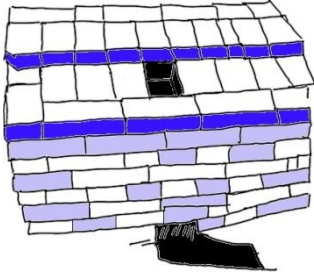


Figure 7: Toilet or Simply a Hole?

The potteries are also tailor made for funeral purpose. Some of them show a protruding tube, meant for funnelling the sacrificial blood into ground. The “toilets” described by archaeologists seem to be “ordinary holes” meant for pouring blood into underground to nourish the dead in the underground burial chambers.

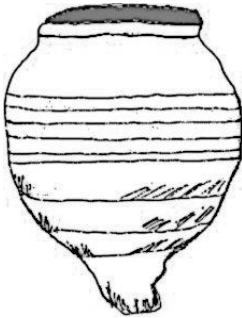


Figure 8: Protruding Pot.

The current explanation that the seals were used as some kind token of identity of ownership of goods exchanged in trade does not seem to be accurate. Indus seals generally depict the date and month in which a person died. Some other seals show the date and month in which an important sacrifice or ritual were carried out. The

important seals indicate the solar eclipse and lunar eclipse dates. (This issue is being separately discussed in another article)

One of the photographs presented by American Professor Jonathan Mark Kenoyer (Images of Asia) (Kenoyer) in the web site images of Asia shows enormous amount of broken pottery. The broken pieces have been heaped into small mounds. Such a scenario is not possible in ordinary site. Traditional explanation will be that it would have been a potter's yard. If a potter produced and broke all his pots or produced such poor quality of pots that large number of pots broke at the manufacturing stage itself, then such a potter would not have survived for long. The probable explanation is that these sites at Mohenjo Daro and Harappa were necropolises, and for centuries, ancient Hindus could have carried out their funeral ceremonies here. During such funeral ceremonies, many pots will be deliberately broken. That explains the large amount of broken potteries seen in the photograph.

Many theories about decline of IVC are also doubtful, because it never declined at all in the real sense. Many of the cultural ideas depicted in Indus seals are still being practiced as on today. It looks like that as if Indus culture had declined, because of the deserted nature of excavation sites. The sites were looking deserted at the time of excavation by British archaeologists because they were burial grounds and not living places. A burial place will naturally give a deserted look because of fear of ghosts and no one will occupy such a place. In contrast to that a living place is a valuable real estate

and it will never be deserted, generation after generation it will be rebuilt. Even if new invaders had captured these places, they would have occupied these sites after expelling the inhabitants of these sites. Such a thing did not happen. These Indus sites were not rebuilt because they were haunted places and no one wanted to live in such places. The culture of building elaborate tomb houses vanished with the arrival of Indo-Europeans, who were tomb raiders not tomb makers.

Now, a relevant question will definitely be raised, why no human bones have been found in the excavated area, if these places were cemeteries. During excavations some bones and skeletons have been found, in addition to that some areas have been clearly marked as graveyards. However, large skeletons and bones were not found in these sites to fit this new grave yard theory. Mummies or dead bodies are not being found because later day invaders would have raided these tombs. When dead bodies and bones were exposed to light and heat, bones would have been pulverized within few days. Similar is the explanation offered by Wunderlich in his book for an analogous question. There are many evidences of skeletons in these sites in support of the necropolis theory. In Possehl's book the map at page 160 (Figure 9.1) shows that skeletons are strewn around all over the place, not restricted to any small location as normally expected. (L.Possehl, 2003) This shows that entire place was used as a burial ground and not merely a small enclosure within the site.

The Great bath is the only structure that had been properly identified so far. Probably it was used as a place for carrying out religious rituals. Only clarification

required is that probably this great bath was used for funeral ceremony and not for any other ceremonies. As per prevailing Hindu custom, any funeral ceremony is conducted around a water body like seashore, riverbank, or side of a pond. During the course of ceremony person making sacrifices to the dead person will be required to take bath frequently. He has to wash himself clean at the beginning of the ceremony, middle of the ceremony and finally at the end of the ceremony. Finally, the offering will be made to a crow, and remaining offerings will be thrown into water; ashes of cremated body will be finally thrown into a water body. This great bath might have served such a purpose.

It is likely that mummification would have been carried in these Indus sites. Mummifications would have brought lot of revenue to those professional physicians and funeral priests. Further, as long as mummies existed, those mummies would have required regular poojas and animal sacrifices supposedly to sustain the souls of those dead persons. All these activities would have sustained the mortuary temples of these places. Even though there is no evidence of mummification in Hindu culture as on today, but the remnants of that practice can be seen in present day rituals for the dead. After cremation of the body, the final ceremony is held only on 40th day, until then mourning period continues. How this period of 40 days of mourning is arrived at? It is simply because of the fact that mummification process requires 40 days for a proper preservation of a body. Verifying the data available with Egyptian mummification techniques will show that it took exactly 40 days to preserve the body.

Decline of Indus civilization

So many theories have been propounded to explain the decline of Indus culture, but none of the explanation is satisfactory, because it never declined at all in real sense. Imagine the situation that Indus people were using those places as necropolises and later came grave robbers with scant respect for those buried in those places. Those invaders could have destroyed those places, because their main intention was to dig out some valuables like gold, or some metal out of the jewellery, utensils, or weapons buried along with the deceased persons.

Later entirely new culture came; they were the people who burnt the body, to outsmart the grave robbers. This cremation practice became more prominent and old practice of burial declined, resulting in burning of all funeral materials. It is not only that to avoid grave robbery, our ancestors have resorted to burning of dead bodies, there is also another important reason. The practice of “Black magic” requires the body parts of some deceased persons. The magician will make a “magic portion” out of body parts and the Magician will control the soul of the dead person. That is a recurring theme in all the magic stories of India. Practically also, black magic is still being practiced in India even today. To avoid such a fate to soul, ending in the hands of magicians, our ancestors would have preferred to burn the dead body. This is a strong reason for the shift in funeral practice in Indus Culture. This could have resulted in a scene where it gives an impression that these places were occupied by culture less people. Cultured people were

very much there and Indus culture never declined in a proper sense, which explains the re-emergence of all cultural ideas of Indus people in the later period.

Similar situation existed in the Greek culture also after the fall of Minoan palace culture, in Greek history also there is a dark period in which no evidence of culture is seen. Later, it re-emerges after a period of 500 years. Wunderlich correctly observes that, it is wrong to conclude that no cultured people existed during that period. Only mistake of those people was that they were practicing burning of corpses instead of burial. The situation narrated by Wunderlich on Greek culture is very similar to the scenario presented in Indus valley.

Acknowledgements and references:

ⁱ All pictures in this article are adapted and drawn based on photos available in the web site Harappa.com. Professor Jonathan Mark Kenoyer has taken these photos are has published these photos in this web site.

ⁱⁱ Majority of the facts about Indus civilization are from articles presented in Wikipedia (The free encyclopaedia). (Indus Valley Civilization)

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